DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 785 HE 025 603

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TITLE Classroom Seating Preference and Level of Self-Esteem.
PUB DATE 18 Apr 92
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Southwestern Psychological Association (Austin, TX, April 16-18, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Females; Higher Education; Males; *Self Esteem; *Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS *Seating Preferences; Student Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study was done to examine the relation between classroom seating preference and level of self-esteem, in particular the influence of gender on self-esteem and seating preferences among community college students. The study administered a 16-item questionnaire to 231 students (104 women and 127 men) enrolled in sections of an Introductory Psychology course. Of this total, 27 women and 16 men were seated in the front rows, while 16 women and 18 men were seated in the last rows. An analysis compared the self-esteem scores of the entire sample of women with the entire sample of men and failed to reveal a reliable difference, suggesting that the self-esteem of the two groups was equal. A two-way analysis of variance performed on the self-esteem scores of the men and women seated in the first and last rows respectively also failed to reveal a significant effect, though the pattern of the data showed that men seated in the first row and women seated in the last row reported higher self-esteem scores than their counterparts. This indicated that high self-esteem scores are associated with sitting in the front of the classroom only for men. Included are 11 references. (JB)

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Classroom Seating Preference and Level of Self-Esteem

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HE 025 603

Poster presented at the annual Southwestern Psychological Association Convention, April 16-18, 1992, Austin, TX.

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Studies have shown that students who sit in the front of the classroom tend to have higher grades (Holliman & Anderson, 1986), lower absences (Brooks & Rebeta, in press), and greater participation (Sommer, 1967) than those students who sit in the back row. A study by Koneya (1976) found that more verbal students took advantage of the opportunities for greater student-teacher interactions when seated in the front of the classroom. When less verbal students sat in the front of the classroom, they failed to take advantage of such opportunities. Rebeta and Brooks (1989) and Mercincavage and Brooks (1989) found that students seated in the front of the classroom had higher achievement motivation than students seated in the back.

If sitting in the front row provides increased opportunities for student-teacher interaction, then those students who score high in self-esteem or social competence and enjoy such student-teacher interaction should be seated there. This hypothesis was apparently validated for men but not for women in a previous study by Armstrong, Hudon, Davis, Neufeldt, and Roberts (1991). However, there was no difference in overall self-esteem scores between men and women. This lack of gender effects coincided with a previous study (Hillman, Brooks, & O'Brien, 1991). The present study was designed to further probe these findings.

Method

Subjects

A total of 231 completed questionnaires (104 women, 127 men) were obtained from students enrolled in sections of an Introductory Psychology course. Of this total, 27 women and 16 men were seated in the front rows, while 16 women and 18 men were seated in the last rows.

Apparatus

The Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI) is a 16-item, Likert-type scale having a possible low score of 0 and a possible high score of 64. Higher scores are associated with higher levels of self-esteem.

Procedure

During the second week of the spring semester, the TSBI was administered to eight Introductory Psychology classes. All students who completed the informed consent form were instructed to read and complete the front and back page of the one-page survey. They were then instructed to write a number, that corresponded to the row in which they were seated, in the upper right-hand corner of the front page. Row 1 was designated as the first horizontal row in the classroom.

Following tabulation of the score for each subject, the questionnaires were separated by gender. Within each gender group, the scores were tabulated for those subjects seated in the first row. The first row was defined as the lowest numbered row having

more than two subjects. The scores for any subjects seated in front of the operationally defined first row were combined with those scores of the first row. Scores for those individuals seated in the last row were tabulated in the same manner. The last row was operationally defined as the highest numbered row having more than two subjects. The scores of any subjects seated behind the last row were combined with those of the last row.

Results and Discussion

An initial analysis compared the self-esteem scores of the entire sample of women with the entire sample of men. As the results of this analysis failed to yield a reliable difference, $F(1, 229) = .035$, $p > .10$, it can be concluded that the self-esteem of these two groups was equivalent. While the lack of reliable differences in self-esteem is in accord with recent data reported by Buzzanga, Miller, Perne, Sander and Davis (1989), it stands in marked contrast to previous reports (Davis, Bremer, Anderson & Tramill, 1983; Davis, Martin, Wilcc, & Vorhees, 1978) demonstrating that men had higher levels of self-esteem than did women. In attempting to reconcile these discrepant findings, attention is drawn to the fact that those studies showing greater self-esteem for male subjects were conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Possibly the passing of a decade, which has seen substantial numbers of women enter prominent positions in the work force and an upsurgence in the feminist movement, has resulted in a lessening of these differences in self-esteem.

To investigate the relationship between self-esteem and

classroom seating preference, a two-way analysis of variance was performed on the self-esteem scores of the men and women seated in the first and last rows, respectively. The results of this analysis failed to yield a significant effect; F (1, 73) = 1.201, $p > .10$. However, the pattern of the data is consistent with previous research (Armstrong, Hudon & Davis, 1991) showing that men seated in the first row and women seated in the last row reported higher self-esteem scores than their counterparts. Thus, high self-esteem scores are associated with sitting in the front of the classroom only for men.

At this time the reason for this pattern of results is unclear. Perhaps the causes have something to do with differential fear of success between men and women. Perhaps self-esteem is positively related to desire or increased interaction in men, but not in women. It is tempting to speculate that continued research combined with a meta-analysis performed on the data from these separate studies would yield a significant effect.

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